Still Hidden: A Full Record Of What the U.S. Did in Chile

By Peter Kornbluh

As Augusto Pinochet continues to fight extradition from England to face charges of crimes against humanity, the historical record of U.S. support for the former Chilean dictator remains *desaparecido*—disappeared—like so many victims of his violent regime. Unless President Clinton ensures that the record is brought to light, a singular opportunity to find answers to unresolved cases of atrocities against Chileans and Americans, and to fully understand the role U.S. government played in this Cold War tragedy, will be lost.

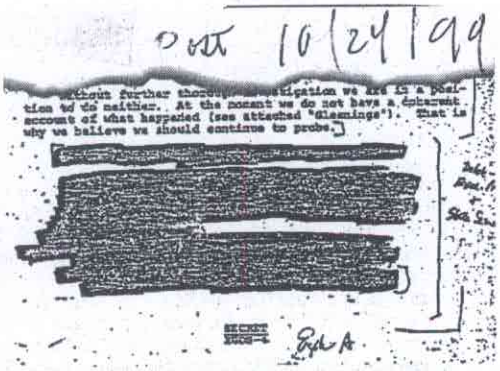
In the wake of Gen. Pinochet's stunning arrest in London one year ago, the Clinton administration has been conducting a special "Chile Declassification Project." On Feb. 1, U.S. national security agencies were directed "on behalf of the president" to begin searching their archives "and review for release . . . all documents that shed light on human rights abuses, terrorism, and other acts of political violence during and prior to the Pinochet era in Chile."

What began as a precedent-setting exercise in official openness, however, has devolved into an example of government censors holding history hostage. The "securocrats" of the national security bureaucracy are blocking the release of virtually all documents that chronicle the full extent of the U.S. role in Chile. The result, so far, is a public record skewed by omission, open to charges of fraud and a coverup.

Peter Kornbluh is a senior analyst at the National Security Archive. His book "The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability" will be published next year by the New Press.

Chile holds a special place in the annals of American foreign policy. During the mid-1970s, the country that poet Pablo Neruda described as "a long petal of sea, wine, and snow" became the subject of international scandal. News reports re-

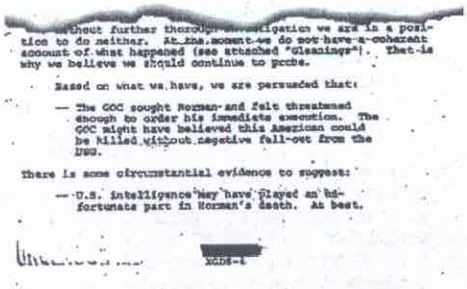
See **HISTORY**, *B5, Col. 1*



Date 10/24/99

...without further thorough investigation we are in a position to do neither. At the moment we do not have a coherent account of what happened (see attached "Gleanings"). That is why we believe we should continue to probe.

Above: Excerpt from an Aug. 25, 1976, State Department memo on the death of American Charles Horman that was heavily edited when released to his family in 1980; below, suspicions of the U.S. role emerge in the same document as made public earlier this month.



...without further thorough investigation we are in a position to do neither. At the moment we do not have a coherent account of what happened (see attached "Gleanings"). That is why we believe we should continue to probe.

Based on what we have, we are persuaded that:

— The GOC sought Norman and felt threatened enough to order his immediate execution. The GOC might have believed this American could be killed without negative fall-out from the USG.

There is some circumstantial evidence to suggest:

— U.S. intelligence may have played an unfortunate part in Horman's death. At best.

[redacted]

HISTORY, *From B1*

vealed that the CIA had conducted massive clandestine operations to undermine the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende and help bring the military to power in 1973. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's embrace of the Pinochet regime, despite its ongoing atrocities, prompted Congress to pass the very first laws establishing human rights as a criterion for U.S. policy abroad.

The CIA's covert operations and the debate over U.S. policy toward Pinochet generated a slew of secret documents. So, too, did the 1973 murder in Chile of two U.S. citizens, freelance writers Charles Horman and Frank Teruggi, as well as the brazen 1976 car bombing in Washington that killed former Chilean ambassador Orlando Letelier and his American associate, Ronni Karpen Moffitt. The Clinton administration's special review carried the promise of finally declassifying these records and answering the outstanding questions that haunt this shameful era.

Such questions include:

- What role did the United States play in the violent coup that brought Pinochet to power?
- Why was Horman, whose case was made famous in the Hollywood movie "Missing," detained and executed? Did U.S. intelligence somehow finger him, as recently declassified documents suggest, for the Chilean military?
- What support did the CIA provide to Pinochet's notorious secret police, the DINA?
- Could the United States have prevented the assassination of Letelier and Moffitt on American soil?

Since the White House ordered declassification, the agencies' review has yielded almost 7,000 documents—a major feat given the usual snail's pace of the national security bureaucracy. On June 30, the administration released some 5,800 records, covering the most repressive years of Pinochet's bloody rule, 1973 to 1978. Significantly, however, 5,000 of those were from the State Department; the CIA released only 500 documents—a fraction of its secret holdings on that period.

On Oct. 8, approximately 1,100 documents were declassified in a second phase that was supposed to cover the years of Allende's presidency, 1970 to 1973. Based on the accumulated evidence of U.S. involvement in Chile during that period, that figure is a meager percentage of the true record.

To be sure, some of the documents that were declassified contain extremely detailed information on the Pinochet regime, and they undoubtedly will prove useful to future efforts within Chile to hold Pinochet's military officers accountable for human rights violations.

But while Chileans are learning about their dark history from the U.S. documents, American citizens are learning almost nothing about their own government's actions. Among more than 25,000 pages released to date, there is not a single page of the thousands of CIA, National Security Council (NSC) or National Security Agency (NSA) records on U.S. policy and operations to bring down Allende and help Pinochet consolidate his rule. This documentation includes the files of the CIA's covert "Task Force on Chile," planning papers from the Nixon White House, records of U.S. material support for the DINA, and intelligence documents on the Horman and Letelier-Moffitt cases.

That such records exist is beyond dispute. As the subject of repeated controversy over the years, the U.S. role in Chile has generated congressional inquiries, murder investigations, criminal prosecutions and civil lawsuits—not to mention hundreds of requests under the Freedom of Information Act. These have yielded extensive information (which I have spent almost 20 years compiling and analyzing) about what still is hidden.

A close reading of two detailed Senate reports published in 1975, for example, shows that the CIA station in Santiago sent a number of cables about its "liaison relations" with the Chilean DINA after the coup. Justice Department files on the prosecution of former CIA head Richard Helms for lying to Congress about covert operations in Chile reveal that the agency filed daily progress reports on "Track II"—the code name for U.S. efforts to foment a coup against Allende. An aborted lawsuit filed by the Horman family against Kissinger produced references to classified records containing information about Charles Horman's death. But while President Clinton clearly intended these cables, files and records to be released, none of them have been.

The Horman case is a classic example of the cult of secrecy. As the movie "Missing" suggests, his family has long suspected that the U.S. intelligence community knew far more than it admitted about how and why he was singled out by the Chilean military after the coup. But it took 26 years for the U.S. government to acknowledge that State Department officials shared the family's suspicion. "U.S. intelligence may have played a part in Horman's death. At best, it was limited to providing or confirming information that helped motivate his murder . . . ." according to a passage in an Aug. 25, 1976, State Department memorandum released this month—a document that Horman's widow, Joyce, calls "close to a smoking pistol." (When the same document was released to the family in 1980, this critical paragraph was blacked out.) And although Clinton's order explicitly directed agencies to declassify documents on Horman, neither the CIA nor the NSA has released a single record relating to his case.

Hundreds of documents have also been withheld on the Letelier and Moffitt assassinations—albeit with the explanation, wholly unsatisfactory to their families, that these records are material to an "ongoing" investigation into Pinochet's possible role.

As coordinator of the Chile Declassification Project, the NSC bears responsibility for failure to comply with the president's directive. Under its watch, countless documents have been blocked from release.

The CIA, which has the most to offer history but also the most to hide, has refused to conduct a full file search of its covert action branch, the Directorate of Operations. After I sent a comprehensive list of documents missing from the first release to the CIA's declassification center—the address of which is classified—an official informed me that the agency was "not legally obliged" to search such files because it had never "officially acknowledged" covert operations in Chile. (President Gerald Ford's public admission in 1974 that the CIA had covertly intervened in Chile apparently doesn't count.)

Moreover, with the acquiescence of the NSC, the intelligence community has taken the position that policy and planning documents are "not responsive" to the president's directive. Under this narrow interpre-

tation, the deliberations of Nixon, Kissinger, Helms and others in plotting and financing political violence in Chile will not be considered for declassification—severely distorting the historical record.

Consider one example: The CIA has released one heavily blacked-out cable reporting on the October 1970 kidnapping and murder of Chilean Gen. Rene Schneider, who opposed a military move against Allende. But the agency did not even submit for review the dozens of secret "memcons" (memorandums of conversations), meeting minutes and briefing papers showing that the White House and the CIA covertly orchestrated this operation in an aborted attempt to instigate a coup in Chile.

To the surprise of the intelligence community, the National Archives Records Administration (NARA) found such documents among Nixon's papers. In compliance with Clinton's order, these records were submitted to the Chile Declassification Project, but CIA and NSA officials objected to their release. Since the documents deal with the Allende era, they should have been made public on Oct. 8. They weren't.

It is unclear how many, if any, will be included in the third and final declassification, now scheduled for April. Under the media spotlight, the CIA recently said it will review some records related to covert action. But it is unlikely that the credibility of this important project can be salvaged unless the president explicitly orders full cooperation and maximum disclosure.

There are compelling reasons to do so:

Abroad, Washington's reputation as a standard-bearer on human rights is at stake. It will prove far more difficult to encourage Chileans to undergo a process of truth and reconciliation if Washington is unwilling to admit its own involvement in their history. Indeed, the credibility of U.S. diplomatic efforts to press other nations, from Germany to Guatemala, to acknowledge and redress their mistakes of the past will be undermined by this flagrant attempt to hide our own.

At home, the American public has the right to know the full story of U.S. policy toward Chile and Pinochet's brutal regime. And his victims' families deserve to be able to lay this painful history to rest. Clinton's directive said the declassification project responded, in part, "to the expressed wishes of the families of American victims." But an incomplete review, as Joyce Horman wrote recently, would be "little more than an exercise in hypocrisy."

At least rhetorically, Clinton appears to agree: "I think you're entitled to know what happened back then and how it happened," he recently told reporters. We are indeed. But only if he takes concrete action to support his words will Americans finally learn what was done in Chile—in our name, but without our knowledge.